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## THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT<sup>1</sup>

PROFESSOR LEWIS B. PATON, PH.D.  
Hartford, Conn.

Professor Davidson was one of the greatest Old Testament scholars of our generation. His *Hebrew Grammar* is the best student's manual in the field. His commentaries on Job, Ezekiel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah in the *Cambridge Bible* are masterpieces of exposition. His articles in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, and in numerous theological and critical reviews are epoch-making contributions to the study of the Old Testament. From his classroom have gone out such famous scholars as Robertson Smith, George Adam Smith, Elmslie, Thomson, and Skinner. To his quiet influence is mainly due the general adoption by the Free Church of Scotland of modern critical views in regard to the Old Testament. It was with great satisfaction, therefore, that we learned a number of years ago that he had promised to write the volume on Old Testament theology in the *International Theological Library*. We have looked forward eagerly for the appearance of this book, and have anticipated that, when it appeared, it would be the greatest work on the subject in English, or perhaps in any language. When we heard of the author's death in 1902, we were grieved to think that this long-expected volume would probably never be finished; but were presently comforted by the news that the manuscript had been left nearly complete and would soon be published under the able editorship of Principal Salmond. Dr. Salmond has at last completed his arduous labor of love in collecting and editing the notes left by his friend, and the result lies before us in this *Theology of the Old Testament*.<sup>1</sup>

It is a book that one takes up with enthusiastic anticipation of pleasure and profit in reading it, but one lays it down with a keen feeling of disappointment. The material in it may all be Davidson's, but we miss the masterly power of co-ordination that is seen in his earlier writings. Apparently his notes were left in a scattered, fragmentary form, and the editor, who is not an Old Testament critic, was not able to fit them into a consistent

<sup>1</sup> *The Theology of the Old Testament*. By the late A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh; edited from the Author's Manuscripts by Principal S. D. F. Salmond. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904. Pp. xi + 553. \$2.50, net.

logical framework. Two or three different stages of opinion are frequently placed side by side, like the duplicate narratives in the Old Testament histories. It is no reproach to the editor to say that Davidson himself would probably have put the material into very different form had he lived to complete his task. Posthumous publications are rarely a credit to their authors, and this book adds one more name to the long list of works that one wishes, for the sake of the fame of the departed, had never been published.

Biblical theology is rightly conceived by the author as a purely historical discipline. On page 1 it is defined as "the knowledge of God's great operation in introducing his kingdom among men." On page 2 it is said of God's operation: "It is historical, and it is progressive; it covers a long period, and it advances from less to more, and finally culminates." On page 11 it is said: "Our subject really is the History of the Religion of Israel as represented in the Old Testament." On page 5 the dependence of biblical theology upon criticism and exegesis is recognized. "If it be the presentation to ourselves of the gradual advance of the kingdom of God as exhibited to us in the successive books of Scripture, it is necessary that we should see how these books follow one another, and know the age to which they belong, and of which they reflect the life and the thought. Criticism or Introduction must precede any attempt at a scientific Old Testament Theology." "Obviously, too, Old Testament Theology must be preceded by scientific exegesis of the literature in its length and breadth." On page 12 the organic connection of the religion of Israel with the history of Israel is recognized. "Each step of progress was intimately connected with the people's history—with their experiences. Revelations of this truth or that were not made sporadically, but were given in continuous connection with the national life and experience, and so the truths are interlinked with one another in the same way as the successive stages of evolution in the national history are."

If all this is true, then it is clear that the first duty of the Old Testament theologian is to sift the literature of the Old Testament and arrange the documents in chronological order as a preliminary to writing the history of the nation and of its religion. It is not necessary that he should present us with the entire apparatus of criticism; but he must at least justify his fundamental positions, and show that he has thoroughly investigated the problem of the age of every portion of the Old Testament. This duty Davidson has not fulfilled. He has, indeed, given us, on pages 15-22, a rough sketch of the history of Hebrew literature that shows that he adopts all the main contentions of modern criticism, but this is inadequate as a

preparation for writing a history of the religion of Israel. From the period before the exodus we have, he says, no literature. "What we have is the view of this period taken in the ninth and eighth centuries." To the period between the exodus and 800 B. C. belong the Books of Judges and Samuel, the older documents of the Hexateuch, and the legislation contained in the Book of the Covenant. To the period between 800 and 586 belong the great literary prophets and Deuteronomy. To the period after the exile, from 586-400 B. C., belong Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, the Priestly Code of the Hexateuch, the Psalter, and much of the Wisdom literature. To the period between 400 B. C. and the close of the canon belong Daniel, Ecclesiastes, and Chronicles.

This classification of the literature is good so far as it goes, but it is inadequate for historical purposes. There must be a far more searching analysis of the literary strata in all the books of the Old Testament before we are ready to say what was the religion of any given period. This Davidson has not given us, and his book shows that he has not made it for himself. On page 61 he argues from the reason annexed to the fourth commandment, "In six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth," that theoretical monotheism was already the religion of Moses; but the Mosaic authorship of the Decalogue is seriously doubted by many modern critics and cannot, therefore, be assumed without argument; and practically all modern critics are agreed that the reasons annexed to the Decalogue are late additions, and that the reason annexed to the fourth commandment in particular shows knowledge of the post-exilic priestly document in Gen. 1:1-2:4a. Here failure to make a precise literary analysis vitiates the entire argument. In like manner, on page 111 the spirituality of the Mosaic conception of God is argued from the prohibition of images in the second commandment. Even granting that the Decalogue in its simplest form may be Mosaic, it is impossible to defend the Mosaic authorship of the second commandment, as we are accustomed to number it. The best men of Israel show no knowledge of it before the time of Hosea; the Book of the Covenant contains no such sweeping prohibition, but forbids only "molten gods," and the number ten of the commandments is complete without it. Here, accordingly, Davidson bases a large conclusion on a very uncertain foundation. The same difficulty runs through the entire book. There is no precise analysis of the historical books, no discrimination of the secondary elements in the prophets, and no effort to disengage the older portions of the poetical books from their later setting; but without this we cannot have a *history* of the Hebrew religion.

After the critical analysis and the dating of the documents of the Old

Testament are completed, the second task of the Old Testament theologian is to divide his subject into periods and to describe the religion of Israel during each period. Davidson recognizes that this is the natural method; nevertheless, without giving any justification of his procedure, he abandons the ordinary historical method and discusses the material under the topical divisions of systematic theology. Accordingly, instead of having as subdivisions the pre-Mosaic period, the Mosaic period, the pre-prophetic period, the prophetic period, etc., as the historical introduction would lead us to expect, we have the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of redemption, the doctrine of the last things. This is as unnatural as it would be for a church historian to discuss the entire Christology or soteriology of the church at one time. The theology of every generation is merely a logical unfolding of its idea of God; and when the idea of God changes, all the other doctrines of religion change with it. The only natural method of writing a history of theology, therefore, is to take the idea of God in each successive period and show how the other beliefs of the period grew out of it; then proceed to show how a new idea of God came into being in the next period, and how it affected the other beliefs. The reason why Davidson departed from this natural method of treating his subject was evidently his lack of definite opinions in regard to the dates of large portions of the Old Testament. He was too uncertain of his sources to feel himself able to give a precise account of the religion of Israel in the successive periods of its development; and, therefore, he chose a topical rather than an historical subdivision of his material. By this means he sought to escape the necessity of pronouncing judgment upon the age of doubtful books. It seems strange that he should have felt this timidity. Holding the advanced views that he did in regard to the Hexateuch, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel, he had a sufficient basis for an historical treatment of his subject, even if he left out of account certain books whose age seemed doubtful. It is surprising also that he should have remained in doubt on so many points, when he was able to follow modern criticism so far.

The dogmatic division of the material would not be a fatal defect, if the historical method were carried through rigorously in each subdivision; if, for instance, we had a complete account of the ideas of God that were held by Israel in the different periods of its national existence. Davidson, however, is too uncertain in his dating of the literature to attempt even this task. In not one instance does he give us a true history of the doctrine under discussion. He gives us rather a composite photograph of the doctrines of different men and different ages. In other words, he gives up the historical method that he stated at the outset to be characteristic of

biblical theology and adopts the dogmatic method. The very titles of his chapters, such as "General Character of the Old Testament Conception of God," show how completely he has adopted the dogmatic point of view. Historically there is no such thing as an Old Testament conception of God any more than there is such a thing as a biblical conception of God. What we really find is a multitude of different ideas about God that have been held by different men at different periods of the history. The Yahwist's idea of a God who formed men by hand out of clay and made them live by breathing his own breath into them, who walked in the garden to enjoy the cool evening breeze, who was jealous lest men should attain a wisdom like his own, and who confused their languages in order that they might not build a tower that should reach up to his abode, has little or nothing in common with the idea of God held by a Deutero-Isaiah. To try to roll these discordant theologies together into an "Old Testament conception of God" is as absurd as to try to combine the ecclesiologies of Christendom into a Christian doctrine of the church.

This whole method of treating the subject is an outgrowth of a bygone conception of the Bible as a homogeneous whole, uniformly inspired, and equally profitable for doctrine in all portions. It is not the method of biblical theology, but of that antique theological discipline, biblical dogmatics, which aims to gather the raw material for systematic theology by pigeon-holing all the usable texts on a given subject and ignoring the texts that it cannot fit into its doctrinal framework. That so great a scholar as Davidson should still follow this method is a striking evidence of the power of early training. In spite of all the concessions that he was forced to make to the newer scholarship, Davidson was still essentially a man of the old school. Like Delitzsch, he had learned much from the younger generation, but the new ideas came too late to become an integral part of his thought. He still lived in the realm of the old Protestant dogmatic rather than in the realm of the new inductive science. His sections on the knowability of God, the essence and the attributes of God, the personality and spirituality of God, the spirit of God, read like extracts from an old-fashioned handbook of dogmatics, and we wonder as we read them what all this has to do with Old Testament theology. One is tempted sometimes to think that old sermons of the author have been utilized by the editor to fill up gaps in his manuscript, so much is said about the teaching of "Scripture," and there are so many quotations from the New Testament.

The result of the adoption of the dogmatic method is to lose sight of the fact of development in the religion of Israel. Davidson was too old a man to be influenced by modern natural science and to have the idea of evolu-

tion as the background of all his thinking. Although he states in his introduction that the function of biblical theology is to exhibit the development of the religion of Israel, the continual contention of the body of the book is that there was no development. Such a statement as that on page 180, "The doctrine of Jehovah receives few developments during the course of the Old Testament period," is astounding from a modern point of view. On page 96 he solemnly discusses the question whether monotheism or polytheism came first in history, and reaches the conclusion: "The question probably cannot be answered with certainty, either on Semitic or on Indo-Germanic data." To the modern mind this seems very much like asking which comes first, childhood or manhood, and deciding that it cannot be determined. If Indo-Germanic philology teaches us anything, it is that the gods were originally active powers of nature, and that they became great gods in consequence of a loss of understanding of the primitive meaning of their names and a tendency to attach other active powers to them as attributes. If anything is clear in the field of primitive Semitic religion, it is that a multitude of Baalim were the original objects of worship.

On the whole, Davidson seems to lean to the idea that the primitive religion of mankind was monotheism, which was preserved only among the Hebrews, while other nations developed polytheism; for he represents the religion of the patriarchs as having been substantially the same as that of Moses and the prophets. The statement of Exod. 6:2, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known unto them," he interprets in the antique traditional manner as meaning that the name Yahweh was known to the patriarchs, but that its full religious significance was not yet comprehended by them. This is a most unnatural exegesis, and is contradicted by the fact that both P and E refrain from using the name Yahweh in patriarchal history, showing that they regarded it as non-existent. P even refrains from giving proper names compounded with Yahweh before the Mosaic age. It is surprising that Davidson, who accepts the critical analysis of Genesis, which finds a starting-point in this verse, should still adhere to this impossible harmonistic exegesis. Holding that the name Yahweh was known to the patriarchs, he holds also that all the main doctrines of the Mosaic religion concerning Yahweh were known to them. On page 84 he says: "These stages in the development of the knowledge of God in Israel may be detected: *first*, the primeval Shemitic religion, in which each family had its particular god, whom it worshiped, if not in images, at least in connection with sensuous forms, as groves, trees, pillars. *Second*, a very important development from this primitive Shemitic religion which took

place at a far back period toward a high morality and faith in a spiritual omnipotent God. This development we know as the call of Abraham and the foundation of the Patriarchal religion." On page 97 he says: "Now, if we suppose that the condition of the idea of God among the Shemitic peoples prior to the call of Abraham, or even after his call, was this, that He was a personal power, there are materials in it for that profound religious experience which we know to have been his. The power may easily rise to omnipotence; the personality may easily pass into spirituality, and the union of these two easily into unity." On page 98 he remarks: "It is certain that through God's revealing of himself to Abraham a great purification and elevation took place in his conception of God. The fundamental thought of God did not alter, but it was more firmly grasped and sharply conceived, and probably carried to such a degree of clearness as to involve, if not the spirituality, at least the unity of God." Elsewhere he says that the work of Moses was merely to bring back to full luminousness the lofty idea of God of the patriarchal period that had almost been lost to view.

One wonders how he knows all this about the lofty character of the patriarchal religion. He has told us previously, on page 16, that we have no literature from the patriarchal period itself. "What we have is the view of this period taken in the ninth and eighth centuries." But if we have no contemporary records, and have only national traditions that were committed to writing fifteen hundred years after the times of the patriarchs, we surely cannot hope to derive from these any historical account of the religion of the patriarchs. Criticism has clearly established the fact that the stories of the patriarchs are reminiscences of tribal migrations and tribal alliances, partly of the nomadic Hebrews, partly of the aboriginal Canaanites, and partly of the tribes of Israel at the time of the invasion and occupation of Canaan. The religion that they reflect is not the religion of the patriarchs, but the religion of Israel at the time when they were written. From them it is a hopeless task to try to reconstruct the biographies and religious experiences of individual forefathers called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even if such persons existed as founders of the clans which bore their names. The only method by which the pre-Mosaic religion of Israel can be discovered is by a comparison of the early religion of Israel with other Semitic religions, particularly with the religion of the Bedawin Arabs before Mohammed. Those features which are common to the early religion of Israel and to other early Semitic religions may safely be assumed to have been beliefs of the forefathers of Israel. This method, which is the only scientific one, leads to very different conclusions in regard



to the patriarchal religion from those reached by Davidson. Instead of that religion having been quite as high as the religion of Moses or of the early prophets, we learn that it must have been much the same as that of the other early Semites. On page 176, speaking of the stories of Genesis about Jacob and Esau, Laban, Moab, and Ammon, he says: "Most modern writers regard all this as just the actual situation which history brought about reflected back upon a much earlier time. Jacob and Esau were never children; they are brothers, because kindred peoples. . . . How much truth there may be in these representations I do not stop here to discuss." But this is just the problem that the historian is bound to discuss. If the conception of "most modern writers" be correct, then Davidson must treat the religion of the patriarchal period in a different fashion. In any case, he must not leave such a fundamental problem as this an open one. When on page 110 we read, "Even in Abraham's history God is attached to places. Jacob found him at Bethel—and said, 'Surely God is in this place,'" we feel as if we were reading the work of a theologian of a hundred years ago.

Having assumed that Abraham believed in one spiritual God, Davidson cannot assume less for Moses. He admits (page 59) that the first commandment, "I Yahweh am thy God; thou shalt have no other gods in my presence," does not affirm the sole deity of Yahweh, but only that he is the only god that Israel may worship; but he denies that we may infer from this that the pre-prophetic religion of Israel was monolatry rather than monotheism. On page 60 he remarks: "The laws are all cast into the form of particular prohibitions. But who can doubt that the comprehensive mind which ministered to Israel those profound abstractions concerning purity, and regard for life and truth, and respect for property, perceived that they expressed the fundamental principles of human society? And is it supposable that with such an insight into morality he stood on so low a platform in religion as to rise no higher than national particularism?" This contention he seeks to support by appeal to the reason annexed to the fourth commandment, but this is certainly a late interpolation in the Decalogue. The language of *Exod.* 15:11, "Who is like unto thee among the gods, O Yahweh," and numerous similar expressions in early literature, he explains away as an adoption of the language of the common people by men who knew better. On page 64 he says: "David, who was certainly (?) a monotheist, uses similar phraseology when he identifies being banished from the land of Israel with serving other gods (*1 Sam.* xxvi. 19)." On page 93 he says that the language of Jephthah in *Judg.* 11:23 f. does not show that he believed that Chemosh had any real existence.

On the very insecure foundation of the second commandment he assumes that visible representations of Yahweh were forbidden by Moses. All the numerous cases of contrary practice in the early history he explains as due to national defection from the pure teaching of Moses, but he fails to account for the facts that there is no parallel to the second commandment in the early legislation; that the best men of the nation, such as Gideon and David, show no knowledge of it; and that there is no polemic against images before the literary prophets.

The only difference between the pre-prophetic and the prophetic religion that Davidson will allow, is that there is a more "abstract formulation" of doctrines in the prophetic period. In his hands the prophets lose their originality, and their function is merely that of the modern preacher—to call men back to a revelation already given.

In these points we see the fundamental defect of the book. It has no feeling for that growth which Christ declared to be the law of the Kingdom of God—"first the blade, then the ear, and afterwards the full corn in the ear." Such a development Davidson is unable to see in the religion of Israel, and because he cannot see it he misses the very life of the Old Testament. There are many fine discussions of particular problems, and many brilliant individual passages that one would like to quote; but there is no history of the religion of Israel. This book will be useful to the weak brethren who are afraid to venture far out on the waters of criticism, and will be useful to the preacher who wishes to gather up the teachings of the Old Testament on any given point; but it will be of little value to the student who is trained in modern historical methods. There are half a dozen better theologies of the Old Testament in German; and in English, Schultz, Piepenbring, and the article by Kautzsch on the "Religion of Israel" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Volume, are much to be preferred.